



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



Ayutthaya, The Old Capital...

by Amaru & Suzanne, Sept 22nd 2007

Since Ayutthaya is only located around 90km north of Bangkok it's very easy to visit it via a day trip and there are many operators offering tours. Suz and I decided to stay over there for one night instead.

Ayutthaya served as the country's capital from 1350 to 1767 and is full of ruins from that time....

Instead of taking a bus, we decided to get there by train so we made our way to the train station, approached the teller and managed to get two tickets to Ayutthaya, in third class, for the price of 15 baht each... That's around AUD 0.50 each, we knew it was going to be cheap... but not this cheap!

The train ride was only around 90min so we didn't mind the fact that we were just sitting on wooden benches... we were sitting in third class after all. And it was quite a fun ride too, and even if the train didn't have a restaurant wagon we didn't have to starve. There was always some people walking the aisles selling you everything from fresh fruits to some sort of pancakes.



Enjoying the train ride
Very basic trains

On arrival we hailed a Tuk-Tuk and told him to take us to Baan Lotus.

We had read some good things about the guesthouse of Baan Lotus and it all turned out to be true. The house itself is gorgeous, the room was great and the little old lady that runs the place is very sweet and very helpful.

After checking in we noticed that they were offering an afternoon and evening tour of the city and its temples. We asked her how long this tour went for and what sights it offered. She explained that it takes around 3-4 hours and we get to visit a few spots that are located slightly outside the main areas of the city and which would be difficult to get to without a vehicle.

Suz and I looked at each other and then decided to do the tour, we were told to come back at 16.30 for the tour and left to have a quick look ourselves at the city.

After some aimless wandering we had a late lunch, relaxed for a while and made our way back to the guesthouse to join the tour.

The first stop on our tour was the monastery of Wat Yai Chaimongkhon and we could see it from quite a distance since its pagoda is quite tall. At this location we found a big reclining Buddha (though not as big as the one in Bangkok) and lots of statues dressed in monk clothes that were surrounding the pagoda.



Suz on the train
On our third class train

It really is an impressive sight, specially when you realize how long they have been here for, this area was constructed in 1357 by the King.



In the back of a local Tuk-Tuk
On our way to our accomodation

Our second stop for the day was the Elephant Kraal Pavilion.

This is where they used to keep the wild Elephants that were rounded up. Nowadays the Elephants aren't wild and so we were allowed to get quite close to them.

We were also told that there was a baby Elephant which was only 15 days old and were told where to find it. The baby was standing with his mother and she was quite protective of him so we were a bit wary as we approached them (they were just standing in the open, no cages just a chain around the mother's ankle). The baby Elephant was very cute, his legs were very unstable and it was a bit funny watching him stumble around his mum.

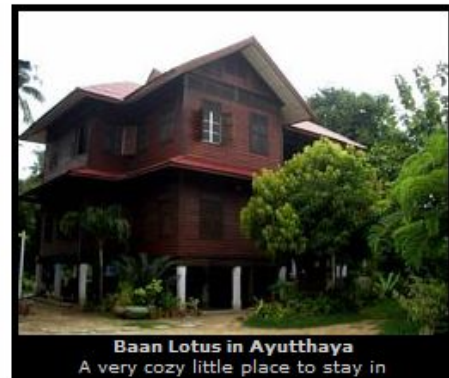
He looked drunk, and Suz thought he was sooo cute, that she was trying to convince me that we should get one as a pet!!!

We were then given some bananas that we could feed the mother with.... and it's quite exiting to do it, the Elephant is huge so you grab a banana and move close to it very slowly while you extend the fruit for them to grab. And then, they just reach over with its trunk and grab it from you without any problems.

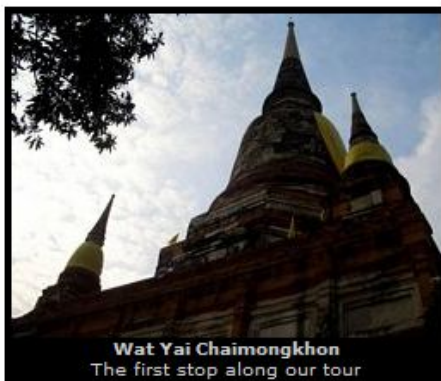
After we had spent arund 40min with the Elephants, it was time to move on towards the next sight on the tour before darkness arrived.

Our guide now took us to the Wat Phukhao Thong, another big temple that we were able to climb to the top and enjoy the sunset from there.

The most striking about this temple was when we noticed that it's not symmetrical at all. It actually seems a bit twisted, as if they built it without really looking...



Baan Lotus in Ayutthaya
A very cozy little place to stay in



Wat Yai Chaimongkhon
The first stop along our tour

It's still quite an impressive temple, just a bit funny to look at!

By the time we reached Wat Chaiwatthanaram the sun had disappered and we were now riding in darkness. So when we arrived at this monastery we were in awe at the lights shining upon it.

At this time of the day the area is closed, but you get some amazing views from the outside. We also got to see the Wat Phra Si Sanphet and Wat Phra Mahathat by night, get a few good photos and then our driver took us to a small night market next to the river.

Here Suz and I managed to grab some food for the grand total of 50 baht (almost AUD\$1 each), sure it was a basic meal, just some chicken with some rice and chicken broth.... but it was very tasty none the less.

The next morning we were scheduled to leave on a minibus at 9.30, since I really wanted to stroll around the Wat Phra Mahathat in daylight I got up early, rented a bycycle from the guesthouse and just made my way over to the area.

Since it's not very far away it only took me around 5min to get there by bike, I paid the admission and entered the grounds. And even though this area is in ruins from the Burmese hoardes, it's still quite an impressive sight.

I walked around the area for a good 10-15min, getting a few photos here and there and just soaking up the atmosphere, I also walked past the great Buddha head which is now grown over with the tree roots, this just happens to be the most photographed spot in Ayutthaya and I could see why!



A line up of Buddha statues
justifies your visit to this monastery



A large Buddha statue
in front of the large pagoda

Well, there was now not much else that I had time to see so I made my way back to the guesthouse quickly, made sure Suz was up and awake, packed our stuff, had a quick breakfast and then we jumped into the minivan that would take us to Kanchanaburi.

You can take the bus from Ayutthaya to Kanchanaburi but then you have to change busses halfway and then when you arrive you need a tuk-tuk to take you to your guesthouse. Doing it that way would have taken 4 hours...

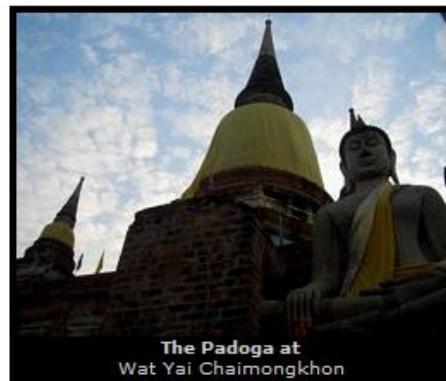
By riding in the minivan we made it in two and got dropped off in front of our guesthouse. Sometimes you get a really cheap trip (like our train journey), and sometimes you just have to opt for a more comfortable one that might cost a little bit more =))

Ayutthaya was quite interesting to see and we were both happy that we had decided to stay a night. First of all, when you do a day trip you don't get to see how amazing these temples and monasteries look at dusk or lit up at night and secondly, we would not have met the sweet old lady who ran the Baan Lotus Guesthouse!

Well, it was now time to explore all the interesting sights that Kanchanaburi has to offer...



These statues
surround the temple



The Pagoda at
Wat Yai Chaimongkhon



Seeing the statues
from the top!



The sunset
is not far away



The local Tuk-Tuks of Ayutthaya
look different to those in Bangkok



Look at that little Elephant...
it's only 15 days old



I'm feeding
the Elephant



The mum is very protective
of her little one



Getting a nice shower
He looks to be enjoying it



We're now at Wat Phukhao Thong
... as you can clearly see!



Our next stop on the tour
The Wat Phukhao Thong



Another big temple
we had to climb



On our way to the top
The steps were quite steep



We were able to see
a great sunset from here!



Wat Chaiwatthanaram
at night!



They do look quite impressive at night
Dont they?



The Wat Phra Si Sanphet
at night!



We decided to visit the night market
for some dinner...



Very basic
but really tasty!



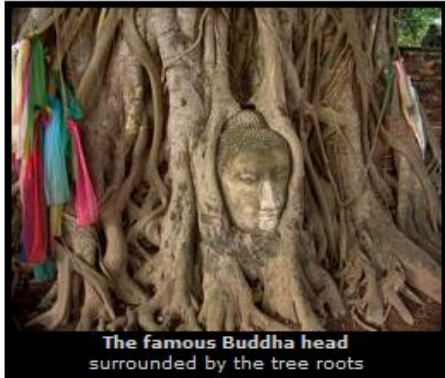
And at 25 baht each
you can't complain =)



We found some Australian butter
... at least we think it is



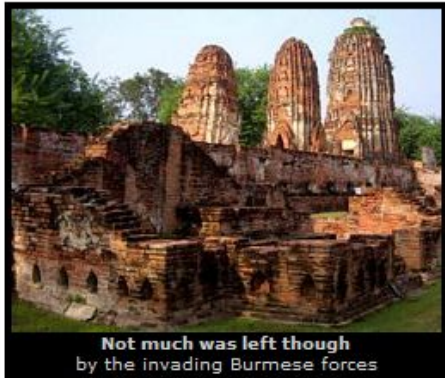
Visiting the ruins of
Wat Phra Mahathat



The famous Buddha head
surrounded by the tree roots



This area dates
back to the 14th century



Not much was left though
by the invading Burmese forces



This Buddha statue
has been decapitated

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